

spirit, without some one or some very few individuals of signal peculiarity or greatness, to concentrate and embody the whole energy of the work. There would be no danger therefore of any one's becoming an idolater of the god of war through the inspiration of the *Eneid*, even if a larger proportion of it had resounded with martial enterprise. Perhaps the chief counteraction to Christian sentiments which I should apprehend to an opening susceptible mind, would be a depravation of its ideas concerning the other world, from the picturesque scenery which Virgil has opened to his hero in the regions of the dead, and the imposing images with which he has shaded the avenue to them. Perhaps also the affecting sentiments which precede the death of Dido * might tend to lessen, especially in a pensive mind, the horror of that impiety which would throw back with violence the possession of life, as if in reproach to its great Author, for having suffered that there should be unhappiness in a world where there is sin.

LETTER VI

IN naming Lucan, I am not unaware that an avowal of high admiration may hazard all credit for correct discernment. I must, however, confess that, in spite of his rhetorical ostentation, and all the offences of a too inflated style, he does in my apprehension greatly surpass all the other ancient poets in direct force of the ethical spirit; and that he would have a stronger influence to seduce my feelings, in respect to moral greatness, into a discordance from Christian principles. His leading characters are widely different from those of Homer, and of an eminently superior order. The mighty genius of Homer appeared and departed in a rude age of the human mind, a stranger to the intellectual enlargement which would have enabled him to combine in his heroes the dignity of thought, instead of mere physical force, with the energy of passion. For want of

* According to Virgil, when [^]Eneas was shipwrecked on his voyage to Italy, Dido hospitably entertained him, fell in love with him, and, not requite her passion, stabbed herself in despair.